

SATURDAY, JULY 31, 1869.

Subject: Soul-Drifting.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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SOUL-DRIFTING.

SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 18, 1869.

“WHICH hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.”—HEB. vi. 19.

WHEN a ship is sailing, the anchor is of no use; but when the ship would lie still, it is the anchor that holds it. It is not alone a storm that requires the good offices of an anchor. In the calmness of the harbor, a ship needs it. In the fairest weather, when winds are as gentle as if a dove’s wings had produced them, a ship will still drift. The silent current, the soft palms of the tiniest ripples thatplash against the sides, gradually push her along; and she will ground upon the flats, or strike upon the shore, or grate upon the harsh ledges. So long as a ship is under headway, the rudder can hold her to her course; but as soon as she is sheltered, and would fain lie still, she must have an anchor.

The soul is like a ship. So long as it is moving with strong impulsion, it holds its course easily. When earnest impulses cease, then, unless something holds the soul steadfast, it drifts; and drifting is far more dangerous to a soul than to a ship. It drifts into doubt; and out of doubts come morbid impulses; and out of morbid impulses come reactions of the most dangerous kind.

The soul, thus bestead, suffers, and despairs, and sometimes is driven up by tides and winds, in some vernal or autumnal night, so far on the sand that the waters, once gone, never come so high again. It lies wrecked.

What a ship is on the sand, cracking in the sun, gaping at every seam, useless, pitiable, unable to help itself or be helped—that is the soul, drifting, and gone up on the arid sands of unbelief.

For hundreds of years, religious unbelief has been treated as a sin,

and even as a crime. Literally, millions of men have been ignominiously executed for unbelief—unbelief, too, in systems and doctrines the belief in which a hundred years later would have been regarded as another sin and an atrocious folly. Unbelief has had no rights in this world.

That there is an irreligion which is most culpable before God, and should be disreputable among men, I do not doubt. When the passions are full-blooded; when men say, in the violence of pride and appetite, "I will not have this man to rule over me;" then, I hold, such irreligion is dishonorable to manhood and culpable before God. The obscuration of faith by the poisonous vapors arising from men's lower nature is a crime against a man's own soul. But to suppose that all unbelief is of this type, is to be ignorant of the most significant and profoundly affecting of the soul's higher experiences.

Surely, no man can have read the biographies of holy men, no man can have been conversant with the living experiences of men of strong intellectual activities and strong moral yearnings, who takes this view. No man can be other than very shallow who supposes that unbelief is, in and of itself, and always, a sin.

It would not be wise to say that great natures must doubt—for that is not true; and yet, there is a certain form of doubt which may be said never to exist except in souls of a highly susceptible moral nature. And as unbelief, in a malignant form, is characteristic of the lower passions, so likewise there is an unbelief which is characteristic of the very highest spiritual feelings. This kind of unbelief is to be treated with the utmost sympathy and tenderness. To stigmatize it, to make it odious, to alarm the subjects of it by threats, is to sin against those who are already overburdened with suffering; and, as I believe, is to sin against the Holy Ghost, who often is leading such men through the wilderness forty years, as God led his people through the wilderness, and into the promised land at last.

Such doubting is not to be confounded with the cold indifference of educated materialism, nor with the flippant and arrogant dissent of a shallow worldly nature, nor with the roistering infidelity of vulgar and ignorant men, plunging headlong into all uncleanness. To rank them all under one name, as if they were of one substance and of one moral nature, is gross indiscrimination not only, but gross injustice. It is the doubt of perplexed consciences, often. It is the reluctant unbelief of men who strive to hold on to that which they received from their parents as a precious legacy, and see it crumbling in their hands.

It is the drifting of sensitive natures, famished and hungering, and searching for something that shall feed them.

While the night is full of stinging insects, and of hard, blundering

beetles, there are also exquisite moths, soft-winged, and of a beauty that one marvels at, since they live and die in darkness; and these exquisite moths fly at the light just as really as the blundering beetles; yea, and often perish in it. And so, although in the night of unbelief there be many noxious insects, there be some fair and beautiful ones, too.

Allow me to delineate so many of the cases of soul-drifting as shall open to you the nature and the causes of it, and some suggestions, also, as to its remedy. If I mistake not, it is a condition of things which is widely prevalent, and which is growing rather than losing ground. I doubt not there are members of this congregation, with upturned faces before me; I doubt not there are multitudes who are members of churches, and who prefer to be classed with Christians, who, if they were to speak their doubts, would say that they have no comfort of their faith; that it is more a pain than a pleasure to them; that it is filled with a thousand uncertainties to every single certainty. And surely, there ought to be some physician for such souls. There ought to be some one who, with gentle teaching, and sympathetic feeling, should minister to the wants of those who are unwillingly losing their hold on positive religion, and who really would be thankful to get again any such view, or any such hold, as would restore to them, in any measure, the joy which they once had, or the joy which they imagine belongs to the Christian life.

Let it be premised, then, that the constructive element is one of the rarest talents in the world, and that, when men have unsettled themselves from religious belief or religious cohesions, the power to reconstruct a ground and to reconstruct a system is one of the rarest human powers that has ever been revealed. Thousands of persons feel that it is a sign of shréwdness and capacity to think beyond their fathers; to unsettle their own minds. There is the feeling that reason is great, and will prevail; and that a man has nothing to do but to put out boldly, if he would find out and settle upon the grounds of truth.

Men in this respect are like four-year old children, that, going down to the shore from the cottage on the sea-side, and finding fastened there a boat, with various appliances with which to manage it, think they will try their hand at navigation. It has been the custom of their elders and betters to have, as a means of navigating boats, sails, and oars, and a tiller, with a rudder attached; but these children say, "Let us not be bound by our fathers' notions." And so, with might and main, they heave the mast and the sails overboard; and then one oar goes over; and then the other goes over; and then, unfastening the painter, they climb into the boat. And then, laughing and saying, "Now for a voyage of the newest fashion!" they push off. And when once the boat is set free, the tide takes her, and, as

there is nothing to steer her, she goes whirling round and round, or drifting in this direction or that, at the mercy of the waves. And when they are far from the land, and the night is coming on, and the sea begins to be turbulent, then, without sails, without oars, without rudder, and without the capacity to manage the boat, with their little palms they try, over the side, to paddle her back. But what can those little four-year old children do toward paddling that masterly boat, with the wind and tide against them, and with no power but that of their little palms? And yet they are mighty to manage that boat, compared to men who unharness faith, and throw off its spars, its oars, its ordinary means of navigation, and say, "Now, having got rid of these superstitions, we will paddle our new views and systems in our own way."

It is not difficult for a man to unsettle his beliefs; but the power to again lay the foundation of beliefs, to fashion them, and to systematize them, is the rarest that can be conceived of. Almost any other form of genius is given a hundred times where philosophical constructive genius is given once. To form a definite, coherent system of religious belief, requires one of the rarest endowments that God ever vouchsafed to this world. It requires a comprehensiveness, an insight, and a special kind of wisdom, singular among all the different wisdoms. It requires a patience of investigation, and then a long ripening of knowledge, such as not one man in an age has given to him. It is far more likely that there will be another Homer, than that there will be another Augustine; that there will be another Shakespeare, than that there will be another Calvin; that there will be another Milton, than that there will be another Arminius; that there will be another Dante, than that there will be another Edwards.

When, therefore, men think that to unsettle their belief is not a perilous experiment, they are very greatly mistaken; for it is a gulf darker and more dangerous, perhaps, than any other into which a man can precipitate himself.

One of the great causes of soul-drifting is the heedlessness with which men part, early in life, from their hereditary faith, and from those symbols of thought and feeling round about which education has associated the most precious habits of the mind. For things are like words; and words are men's soul-journals. What is *mother* but a register, a book, as it were, in which each of you has laid up the most precious thoughts of that sainted one? What is *father*, what is *wife* or *husband*, what is *sister* or *brother*, what is *home*, what is *hearth*, what are all these familiar words, but simply words that contain in them a whole world full of your own life? And when they sound in your ear, they mean the things that you have experienced.

Independent of its absolute usefulness, an ordinance or an act of

worship is like a word. It stores up in itself certain moral associations. And a doctrine that is absolutely false, as a mere matter of philosophical fact, may yet have stood so affiliated in a system that, without seeing its falsity, you shall have associated with it the most precious experiences of your soul-life. And I say that it is not lightly to be thrown away. Neither an ordinance, nor a ceremony, nor a usage, nor a doctrinal statement—even though it may not be the best thing—even though, in some sense, it may be imperfect and erroneous, should be hastily set aside. It is not a safe thing to take away from a man those usages, those doctrines, those customs, which by long education have stored up in them the best thoughts, the best moral and religious feelings, and the best impulses. Take, for example, the sacrifice of Christ. As we have been educated, what is sweeter than the thought of Christ's dying for men and atoning for the sins of the world? What is there that touches the soul with so potent a hand and wakes such deep feelings in our souls, as the doctrine of the sacrifice of Christ? Many of us are accustomed to think of all high and stately things in association with this particular view; and we do not know our own names unless they are associated with it; and you can not evoke from our souls the deepest religious experience except in connection with those instruments which we have trained our hearts up to. Therefore, if a man should disprove this view, as a matter of history and fact and philosophy; if he should take it suddenly away from us, he would take away our Lord. He would take away the thing that we had learned to act Christianly in connection with.

It may be true that when you planted your grape-vine you ought not to have used common oak timber for the trellis. You may say, "That kind of wood rots very quick. It will not stand the weather long. I ought to have chosen cedar. That would have stood a thousand years." Nevertheless, you chose perishable wood. The vine has been growing ten years, and has clambered all over the trellis. And you say, "This is not a good trellis. The vine is magnificent; but the trellis is perishable. It ought never to have been built of such timber. I will take it away, and put another in its place." And you go and get your ax, and hew down one corner-post, and then another, and then another, and then the other; and then you strike out the middle one, and down goes the trellis; and with it down goes the vine. And when it lies full on the ground, helpless and disheveled, you begin to think, "How shall I get it up again?" It is easier to get down a vine that runs forty feet in every direction than to get it up. And by the time you have got it propped up, and have built a new trellis under it, what with rude twistings, and wild sweepings, and rough handlings, the vine itself will be so much damaged that the whole top, nearly, will have to be cut off; and the vine

will have to start again almost from the root; and it will be years before it will regain its former size and strength.

Your theology is your trellis. Your form of worship may or may not be true; but you have been taught from your cradle to associate obedience, sympathy, gratitude, love, the various moral elements, with certain philosophical statements; and when you have become habituated thus to associate them, it is not safe, even if those philosophical statements are false, to take them away suddenly. It is to be done by taking away one single post while you are putting another in its place, so that the great outward form shall not be disturbed. The new is little by little to be substituted for the old. Sudden, sweeping changes are pernicious. There are cases in which even such changes are desirable; that is to say, there are cases in which the mischiefs of bad government in a community are so great that the most violent revolutions are better than the stagnation and miasma of the old state of things. But, ordinarily speaking, it is not so.

Next to the danger of being stagnant is the danger of moving. There is no man on earth who is not in danger. If he stands still, he is in danger; and if he goes ahead, he is in danger. Life is one comprehensive danger in one point of view, and in another point of view it is one comprehensive safety.

As soon as various causes have acted to remove one from his moorings, the drifting will begin. And as the noblest natures can not be happy without religion—without food from the invisible and the infinite—for their spiritual sense, so, the moment they begin to drift away from settled ground, from firm anchorage, from a permanent position, they begin to be unhappy.

1. Men are set adrift by an early and over-enterprising attempt to go out and battle in the armor of theology. This is particularly true in the schools of eminent intellectual theology, such as the schools of Calvin and Augustine. The elements which constitute the highest schools of theology range into the infinite and the universal. On this very account they are fascinating. A young and bold intellect scorns the lower and the more familiar forms. There is something peculiarly thrilling to the imagination in running along the lines of the infinite government, and taking in, if possible, the absolute and the universal. The moment men attempt to run through theological systems, the moment they attempt to solve great problems that arise in them, they find themselves overtaxed and overtired. David, going out to battle with Goliath, wearing Saul's armor, which was a world too big for him, is the model of Davids ever since attempting to go out into the battle of practical life incased in the vast armor of these infinite propositional systems.

I have known not a few who were set afloat by *Edwards on the Will*. I have known not a few who have taken up the great theorems of Calvinism—the relations of the divine nature and the divine government to human character and human condition; and in attempting to adjust in their minds all the lines of these great systems, they have come into infinite confusion.

Once afloat, by the intellectual and reasoning process, the law comes in by which letting go one belief before you have taken another shocks the moral constitution. Man is so essentially a believing animal, that the moment you take faith away from him, you take away an element which is indispensable to his spiritual, and so to his normal life. And if you see a thing to be false, your business is, not to accept it as a truth, but to take the true thing. It is better, however, to hold a fable than to drop the fable without having any thing to take its place. A fable held is better than nothing. A positive believing element is the salvation of a man's soul. It is scarcely less than declared to be that when it is said that we are saved by faith. The declaration is, that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. But if there were no affirmation of salvation in Christ, we might still say, "We are saved by faith;" for men must have positive beliefs—and nowhere so much as in the higher realm of moral life. Therefore it is that the unsettling the grounds of theological thought is attended with peril. There is a law by which transition in belief is dangerous. Transition from a lower belief to a higher belief, from a false belief to a true belief, is wise; but transition from a false belief to nothing, is worse than to believe a lie.

Here stands a ladder. Broad the ladder is, and wide are the rounds. May not a man that has been walking on the ground go up a step? Yes, if there is a round for him to step on, he may. May he not go up higher? Certainly he may, if there is another round for him to go up on. May he not take a third step? Yes, he may take a third step. But there the rounds end. And if a man, under the force of theory, says, "One should not stop right in the middle of a ladder; he ought to keep ascending," and takes another step, he steps into the air and goes headlong to the ground. You may go up as long as there are rounds for you to put your feet on; but when the rounds cease, then your progress must cease. You may not like it; but it is your misfortune, and it is your inevitable necessity.

When a man is going from one religious truth to another, as long as he steps from a lower one to one that is ampler and larger, he is safe. He has something substantial that bears him up. But if a man simply says, "This step and that step are poor and false, and I will not have them," and he has nothing else, he plunges right into

moral disease—into that negative state in which there is no faith and no belief.

What a fly is whose head is cut off, that has no steering power, and using its wings and legs, whirls round and round, preliminary to dying, that a man is who has lost his faith. He is a headless insect. And yet there are multitudes of men who think it necessary to their honesty that they should abandon their old beliefs as soon as they suspect that they are erroneous. But neither honesty, nor conscience, nor reason, nor any thing else requires that a man should give up his old faith before he is well-grounded in a better one. No man, by any notions of sincerity, or frankness, or boldness, is bound, in any philosophical investigation, to go a step further than he can find solid footing. No man has a right to unsettle in his own mind beliefs that he has held, until he can substitute for them something that will more than fill their place. It is not investigation, it is not exploring, to go on forming theories or constructing systems which you are not able to reduce to practical forms. And yet this is one of the most witching and one of the most facile temptations which beset the young—and beset them on the side of their generosity.

A young man comes into life, feeling, “I must be true to myself; I must be true to my convictions.” Yes, if you have any thing that is worth being true to, you must be true to it; but if a man has an empty buzz-box which he calls his convictions, and he has nothing which is the result of real thought and accumulation; if he has nothing but a sort of electric fantasy, must he give up every thing that has been accounted sacred before, for the sake of being true to that emptiness in his head? I trow not. Many men, when they are started along the line of new thought which has played upon their minds until there seems a presumption that it is a thing rightly stated, or that it is a better statement than the old one, think that they must sound a trumpet before them; that they must run and declare right and left what they have found out; that they must ring bells, and proclaim, “A new truth has been born!” The probability is, that it is an idea which has been thought of a hundred times, and a hundred times better than you have thought of it, and that you are exposing your ignorance. But how many men there are who can not wait! How many men there are who suppose that their minister has thought a great many things beyond what he preaches; and who say, “I believe he has a good deal that he keeps back.” He is a fool if he has not! A man that preaches all he knows is not fit to preach again! Is there nothing to ripen? Is a man a prophet? Does he foresee at once accurately and all? Is there no such thing as a patient collecting of facts, and a patient organizing of them, and a patient comparing of a man’s views with those of other men, and a

patient settling upon that truth which shall bear the weight of his soul, and his child's soul, and other people's souls? Must a man, in order to reap the poor tribute of shallow sincerity, rush headlong into every new light, that may be fancy or fantasy, and preach it, because he has thought of it? It is a solemn business for a man to teach, when he believes that his immortality and the immortality of others turns on what he teaches. And the man who says, "I will preach to-day what I think now, and to-morrow I will preach what I think then"—I wonder that he ever escaped from the bundle of straw to which he belongs; for his whole body is but straw, and his head is but chaff! This unsettling process; the supposition that a man can by his thoughts easily reconstruct a system of the infinite and universal, has the marks of inexperience in its inception, and very soon will leave the marks of ruin in its progress. It sets a man adrift from the foundations of his fathers, and from his own early foundations. And worse than all, it sets him adrift without any prospect of coming to anchorage. It destroys the foundations and superstructure that have been built, and leaves him helpless to build new foundations and a new superstructure.

2. The various idolatrous partialisms in the church have been the cause of a vast amount of unsettling and of drifting—and that, too, of the best natures. There is an idolatry of dogma; there is an idolatry of external forms; and there is an idolatry of spiritualism. The fact is, that the true Christian religion is a universal religion. It includes elements of all religions. It has in it dogma; but it is not made up wholly of dogma. It has in it external forms; but it is not wholly dependent on external forms. It has in it spiritualism; but spiritualism is not the whole of it. It has practical morality; but practical morality is not the foundation and the superstructure of the whole system. Christ is God to us. Christianity represents Christ to us. It is encyclopedaic. It is universal. Whenever it is perfect and full, it will have in it something of every thing. At present, the elements which constitute the universal Christianity are distributed through all the sects. There is not one sect that has them all. Some have one thing in preëminence; others have in preëminence another thing. Each has a part of the whole truth. They are all partialists. Any one of them has enough of the truth for the salvation of the soul; but no one of them has enough of the truth for the construction of the universal system of Christianity. This is more than is found in any church or sect; and it is represented, so far as it *is* represented, by all the developments of all the sects. It has never had exposition from any one place.

A man who has been brought up to a system of doctrine, precise and exact to the very minutiae—we will say, the Calvinistic sys-

tem—will sometimes come to a point in his life in which he will find that he can no longer accept that system. He has been taught that that is Christianity—not that it is one way of representing one side of universal Christianity, but that it is the essence of it. He has been brought up to believe that if a man deflects so much as the tenth part of a hair from it, he has gone aside from the revealed truth. Men make no distinction between the Bible and the system which has been wrought out of the Bible, though there is just as much difference between the truth in the Bible and systems that are wrought out of it as there is between the iron ore from the mines of Pennsylvania and the implements that are forged out of that ore. You may make tools out of the ore of the Bible, and they may be good tools; but they are not divine, because you made them. There are many persons who have been brought up to believe that the great truths of Calvinism are the marrow of Christianity. I admire them; but I do not admire all the statements of them, and I do not believe that they cover the whole ground. I believe there are other things which are true besides what they contain. I am a heretic, if at all, by more and not by less believing. I see that, to a certain extent and in certain relations, these doctrines are true; and in certain other relations I do not think they are just or true. And this I object to—bringing up a person of sensitive, thoughtful, fruitful mind, with such an idolatry of dogma that when, growing, he finds that his thoughts overrun it, and that he can no longer accept it, he shall feel that he has rejected Christianity, because he has rejected a partialism or dogma.

Let me say, that an element of feeling enters here which is almost never recognized, but which is vital. If a man, or set of men, intellectually well endowed, are under the predominant influence of conscience and self-esteem—those great and powerful organizing spiritual instincts—they will almost invariably be led to take sides with law, and with government, and with the governor. They believe in justice; they believe in law as the instrument of justice; they believe in penalty as a means of enforcing justice. They feel it. It is in them by their organization. Send these men to the Bible, and they will, by an elective affinity, select all those texts that are imperative. *Thou shalt* sounds as sweet to them as music. It is law that they love; it is justice that they seek: and they find traces of them everywhere. When, therefore, they have framed a system, it will be found that it is Calvinistic, and that it exalts God as sovereign, and as a Being that governs by law. And they will say, "That is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

There grows up a son in the family. He is the child not alone

of his father, but of his mother; and she came through a different training. And benevolence in the son is stronger than conscience; though he is not deficient in conscience. Sympathy is stronger in him than self-esteem. He has the most ardent yearnings, therefore, on the side of kindness. When he thinks of men, he thinks of them lovingly and kindly. And although he believes in law, after all, his native sympathies run toward the governed, and not toward the government. And when he goes to the Bible, although he recognizes the great elements of justice, and government, and sovereignty, and God, yet he does not feel that these cover the whole ground. He sees also set forth in the Bible the truths of pity, and mercy, and benevolence. And there arises in his mind, speedily, an idea of government in which there is not so much sternness, and not so much inevitableness, but more of lenity, fewer conditions, more help, more beneficence, without the domination of conscience. He has an element of feeling which leads him to select another class of intellectual elements, and form another system. He is a natural-born Arminian; but he does not know it, any more than his father knows that he is himself a natural-born Calvinist.

I see in the Methodist Church men of whom I say, "What under the sun are they there for? They are Calvinists. I know it by the cut of their head." I see some men in the Calvinistic church, who, if you put the screws on, and bring them right down to what they really believe in their soul, are no more Calvinists than—you are! It is not in them.

Men say that feeling has nothing to do with convictions. I say that on subjects of social and moral truth, feeling is more determinate of results than the intellect itself is. What a man thinks in regard to social and moral truths, depends upon the color that is thrown into his intellect while thinking; and the color is injected by some one or other of the great constitutional emotions or feelings. A man that is predominantly stern on the side of justice, and predominantly firm on the side of self-importance, and so on the side of the importance of rigorous government, leans naturally toward the Calvinistic mode of thinking. But a man that is full of tenderness, and gentleness, and sympathy, and benevolence, and love is constitutionally inclined to inject his intellect with these elements.

There are two fundamental influences that are driving these men apart, though they do not know it; and one says, "It is contumacy that leads you to deny Calvinism;" and the other says, "It is nothing but folly that leads you to adopt it." And so they stand, one over against the other. Each of them is right in some sense; and yet each is fighting the other for taking the view that he does. Suppose I should take a Gradgrind—a man with a hard, practical nature—and a poet

and put them out in a field, and say, "Now prophesy!" Gradgrind would say, "This farm is not worth fifty cents an acre." The poet would say, "How exquisite are these flowers! What a beautiful piece of ground this is!" "Beautiful piece of ground, with a vengeance!" says Gradgrind. "It is swampy, and you can not drain it, and nothing will grow on it." "O what perspectives!" says the poet. "How beautiful the lines are! I wish I had the power to draw them." "The only good thing there is about it," says Gradgrind, "is that tree out there." "Oh! it is divine," says the poet. "What a beautiful form it has!" "Form be hanged," says Gradgrind. "It will cut about four cords of wood, and bring about six dollars in the market!" One of them sees form, and the other money; one color, and the other profit; one what the soil will produce, and the other what beauty there is in the landscape, in its lines, and in the receding perspectives. And each is true to himself; that is, each is true to the class of feelings through which he is looking, and from which he is acting. And do you suppose that this is true in ordinary life, in business life, in political life, and that it is not true in theological life? It is preëminently true there.

The time will come when men will not be held to such a rigid responsibility for theological exactitudes of belief. The harm is in driving men to think contrary to the pattern of their constitution, and teaching them that only that view which is exposed to their minds by such and such constitutional peculiarities is the truth; whereas, that which is of the very opposite tendency is also the truth, and the two put together are more a truth than either of them alone, and both of them together, supplemented by four or five other elements, would only begin to constitute the universal form of truth.

That leads me to say, If you take a man of poetic sentiment, you can scarcely get him into the Arminian Church, as represented by the Methodists, nor into the Calvinistic Church, as represented by the Presbyterians. If he be full of tender associations and sweet seeings, he will incline toward the Episcopal Church. If you add the element of veneration, he says, "I want to worship. I do not feel any great need of thinking; I do not care for your heavy sermons, when you preach the doctrine of government: my soul is hungry. I want gentle, sweet, beauteous influences." And the moment the organ sounds, and the priests come in wearing their vestments, he is impressed by the harmony and order and symmetry which prevail. A thousand covert, glancing ideas are brought to him, which just touch that which is in him; and he says, "That is divine. Now I have found rest. This is beautiful." It is beautiful to him. Why not let him have it?

Christianity spreads a table longer and richer than any hotel in

the land. When you sit down at the table in a hotel, you never eat the whole bill of fare, but take what you want; and your neighbor only takes what he wants; and both of you are well fed. You that eat beef, and you that eat mutton, and you that eat chickens, and you that eat fish, and you that take dessert, and you that eschew dessert, all being well fed, grow and thrive. And so it is at the table of the Lord. Some want high doctrine, and some do not want any doctrine; some want moral sentiment, and some scorn it; some want moralities, and some, pure spiritualities. But a little of every thing is better than one thing alone. So let men feed on that which will nourish them and develop them into manhood.

We are partialists. We see through a glass darkly. We see only in part, and know only in part. This is the declaration of that sublime philosopher, Paul, who, though stalwart for truth, recognized the individual liberty of man's soul, and recognized the partialism of all men—of himself among the rest. Now we see only in parts; we see only fragments.

Under all these circumstances, to hold men to one form of belief—the formalist to formalism, and the anti-formalist to the barrenness of no forms and ceremonies; the high doctrinaire to mere doctrine, and the moralist to mere morality—this is to fit the truth to only one side of their nature.

When the child whose parents are confined in their belief to a given system begins to grow up, and he finds that his wants and desires are not met by that system, and he says, "I can not believe this system," he is told, plumply, "Then you will be damned! You are a lost man!" And he says, "I will try again, then." And he does try again, but he can not swallow the system. And then he says, "Suppose I am damned, I do *not* believe it. I am skeptical; I am an unbeliever; and I will not pretend that I believe." And then, when he thinks of his old father and mother, of his childhood home, of the village church, and of the good old spectacled preacher, who, though he preached cold doctrines had a warm heart, he says, "I will go back to my old faith. I *do* believe it." And then, when he gets over that mood, and comes into an entirely different train of thought, he says, acting under the influence of another class of faculties, "No, I do not believe it, I can not believe it, and I will not believe it." And so he swings, and vibrates, and drifts.

What is the matter with that man? Why is he not allowed to take that which his soul craves, in the great bounty of truth, which is more than any church holds, and more than any man knows how to comprehend and believe? Are there no more stars than those which we have catalogued? And if there are, may they not shine?

Are there no other things but those which have been expounded by one set of minds?

I have seen men who were brought up in the Quaker sect, quit it. Why? Not because Quakerism is not good. It has some elements that are better, I think, than are to be found in any other sect on earth. But it is partial. It has just so many elements, and no more. And certain minds get all the benefit they can from these elements, and then bound out of that sect. Well, let them bound out of it—only say to them, “Go on to something else. If you do not get enough here, go where you will get enough. But do not swing wild and loose.” This drifting, this being held back by one class of feelings, and drawn out by another, and being inconstant to both, and coming to no definite and fixed result—that is mischievous.

A man is brought up in the Episcopal Church; but it does not meet that fervor, that love of unconstrained action, which belongs to his nature; and he feels unsatisfied and impatient. Let him go out and find what he needs. And let there be no stigma attached to his doing it. The Episcopal Church is good, and there are many natures that are abundantly satisfied with it. It comforts and cheers them in this life, and gives them a hope of salvation in the life to come. It is a chariot; and if it takes them to heaven, that is enough. Speak well of the bridge that carries you safely over the stream. Speak well of that which carries you over the morass of life and across the river of death. Some people are satisfied with that church; and why seek to discompose them? But if there spring up among them one that is not satisfied, and he separates himself from them, and they say to him, “You are abandoning the faith of your fathers; you are an alien; you are an apostate,” he says, “I can not stay here, and I am not going to take sides with enemies,” and he does not go anywhere, but settles into a discontented middle ground. Nothing holds him steadfast, and so he drifts; and, drifting, he is in imminent danger.

How blessed will be that day when a man shall say, without fear of ridicule or censure, “I feed sometimes on those elements that are better expounded in this church than anywhere else, and sometimes on those elements that are better set forth in that church than anywhere else”!

We have liberty everywhere but in churches. The very place where Christ should be set forth more gloriously than anywhere else are the very places where my liberty is least recognized—my liberty of thinking; my liberty of affiliations; my liberty of helping myself at other tables than my own. But I declare the liberty of the sons of God in all the earth. For if I am free in the New Jerusalem, I ought to be in the old, certainly. And I have a right to be edified in

the Roman Catholic Church. It must be a poor one in which I can not get something that is good.

When I was in England, I attended the Episcopal Church more than any other; and since I came back, persons knowing that fact have patted me on the shoulder, and said, "You must be living contrary to your convictions; otherwise, you would be an Episcopalian." They can not begin to understand the largeness of the place that I stand in. I own the Episcopal Church. It is mine. And I own the Presbyterian Church. There is not a good thing in it that I do not own. And I own the Methodist Church; and I will go to that church when I have a mind to. I own the Baptist Church. I own the Lutheran Church. I own the Unitarian and Universalist churches, all of them, if they have good ministers in them. I own the Swedenborgian Church. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof;" and I am the Lord's, and the Lord is mine. I am his son and heir. And any thing that Christ loves I will love; any thing that he uses I will use; and those that he sits down among I will sit down among too. And I am not false to my ground here, because I have large sympathy with Christians everywhere. And I do not regard them as better than I am, though they have much that I respect and esteem. I say that they are all imperfect and all partial. And, as Christ looks upon them, it takes them all to represent the one grand and glorious church—and all of them together do not suffice to do it.

There are many who think that these views are themselves very unsettling—as if, by expressing these views, I taught that truth was of no importance; that it was nothing fixed; that it was just what this man, and that man, and the other man thought. If that was so, I should be amenable to the charge of inconsistency; but it is not so.

Is it true, because three painters have different degrees of sensibility to the qualities of form, and color, and combination, that they have no reality in them? I go to one man, and he sees color in painting. That is the predominant element in his pictures. He has something of form, and something of the gift of combination, or grouping; but color is the thing in which he excels. I go to another man, and he is hard and dry in color; but he is wonderful in delineation. His pictures abound in it. But there are only a few figures in them. He is like Meissonnier, who paints, and introduces but one or two or three figures at a time. He has no sense of fullness and largeness in this respect. I go to another man, and he has not much sense of color, and not much sense of form; but he is fond of harmonious grouping, and his pictures are crowded full of figures. There is an abundance of life in his paintings. That is what he feels for in himself and in nature. I like all these characteristics. I see that there is an element of truth in combination, in form, and in

color; and either one of these men would be a greater painter if he put them all in each one of his pictures. And no man would say that there was no such thing as a truth of form, or color, or combination. You would not make any such statement respecting the art. And I say that, as there are these elements of truth in art, so there are elements of truth in theology. And I recognize this fact. But I do not acknowledge that the whole of truth, the full form of truth, is in this sect or that sect.

We are perpetually wiser in the lower range of our intellect than in the higher. We are perpetually dealing with our children just as I say we ought to deal with church-members. We are perpetually dealing with schools as I say we ought to deal with grown-up men. The teacher says, "I have to govern this child and that one very differently." "What!" it is said to her, "do you mean to say that the truth is not always the same? Do you mean to say that the truth is one thing to this child, and something different to that child?" "No," says the teacher, "but it would not answer to treat this sensitive, shrinking child in the same way that a forward, pert, uproarious child needs to be treated." You have to consider a child's nature before you can properly govern him. But that has not been the way of the world. The world has had a kind of cider-mill government. In making cider, men take all the apples they have for the purpose, no matter how many different kinds there may be, and put them into the one mill, and squeeze out the one juice, and call that cider. That does very well for apples; but it does very poorly for a school. The putting children into one great system, and grinding them all up, and attempting to squeeze out from them the same result, in the same way, is preposterous. And it is still more preposterous to attempt to bring all elements together, and make them one, in the realm of theology. Human nature must be changed before this can be done. And when God changes men, so that they shall all be alike, as candles are, that are all just so straight, and just so long, and just so large, and just so heavy, with just such a wick, then these systems can be adopted and successfully carried out; but not until then. We must accept the doctrine of relative truth, and administer accordingly. We must let men have liberty in this respect. We must not insist upon their holding views that have in them just so much of this, that, or the other element. We must recognize the fact that there are such things as component truths, and allow men to mix the various elements of truth. More ignorance, more persecution, and, as a consequence, more drifting, have resulted from intolerance in this direction, than from almost any other cause that can be mentioned.

I have no doubt that there are many people who say, when they

dear men talk in this way, "There ! he has come over to our church exactly. That is what our minister has been preaching ever so long. I knew that he was on our side." Now, I do not want you to tell me; but I *am* on your side ! Others, belonging to another church, say, "Why, he holds those very fundamental truths for which we have contended so long. He has unconsciously stepped into our church." Well, without any publicity, I *have* ! I belong there. Others, belonging to another of the churches, say, "The more intelligent of our ministers have always taken the view which he now takes. He is of our fellowship. He belongs to us." Yes, I belong to you. I belong to all the churches. How is that ? Just in the same way that I belong to the city of New-York, though I live in Brooklyn. I belong to Maine, and New-Hampshire, and Vermont, and Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, and Connecticut, and New-York, and Ohio, and Indiana—dear old soul—and Michigan, and Wisconsin, and Iowa, and Illinois, and Missouri, and Arkansas, and Louisiana, and Mississippi, and Alabama, and Georgia, and Florida, and South-Carolina, and North-Carolina, and Virginia, and Maryland, and Delaware, and Pennsylvania, and—New-Jersey ! I belong to all the States. And is there any inconsistency in that ? Does any man say that there is duplicity in it ? Does any man say that there is hair-splitting in it ? Does any man say that it is mystic or incomprehensible ? In civil affairs, it is easily understood. And why should you not bring common sense into religion, at last ? Why should not men in church-matters what ages have shown to be safe and proper in family matters ? Why should we not do in the economy of churches what we do in worldly matters, and what has been proved over and over again to be wise ?

I had designed to show how ideality, and how various forces and impulses developed by modern refinement and civilization, tend to unsettle men, and produce discontent and soul-drifting; but I must leave it until another time.

In closing, let me say, first, that because God can not be seen, being a Spirit, Jesus Christ presents to the soul the best conception of God which is possible in this mortal state. He is to stand to us in the place of God ; and he is God. Although we think of him as a man, and although that which is human is not supposed to be divine, yet he presents to our mind a better, wider, deeper, and more correct theory and conception of what God is, than can be derived from nature, or philosophy, or any of the analogies of human life or human experience. Therefore, Christ is to be the chief among a thousand, and the one altogether lovely, to us. And he being chief, there is to be developed for him, as one of the ends of life, that enthusiastic fealty and adhesion which exists among soldiers in armies

for their generals. I hold it to be one of the fundamental elements, one of the anchor-principles of religion, that the soul shall have taken hold of God in such a sense that it has for him enthusiasm, and love, and devotion. That will hold a man in any aberrations of the understanding; in any mutations of the intellect; in any diversities of ideality; in any poetic state of mind. All the safety a man can have, in emergencies like these, is in his having found out, and taken hold of, a conception of God which shall be to him what an anchor is to a ship.

You may take your own way to get at it; you may modify your views, if you please; but once let a man call in God in such a way that he can say, sincerely, though he sometimes says it in a whisper, and sometimes in an exulting voice, aloud, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? There is none on earth that I desire in comparison with thee," and nothing can harm him. When a man can say that, he will be held steadfast. That is the anchor that *enters into that within the veil*, and it will keep a man's soul from drifting. But if you have every thing else in the world without that, you can not have steadfastness. No church can prop you up, no institution can hold you, no ordinance can save you, in the day of the swelling tide. Nothing can go with a man into sorrow, into adversity, into bereavement, into the breaking down of his ambitions and prides and vanities; nothing can go with him into bodily sufferings; nothing can go with him when he comes to the dregs of life, when vitality runs low, and the eye and the ear and the hand fail, and he trembles, and death is not far before him—but faith in God. If you are traveling toward God, and your soul seeks him, and you trust in him, then these things will not move you; and you can say, with the Apostle, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me." If you have Christ, you can go through any thing, and bear any thing, and go safely, too; but if you have no Christ, nothing that electrifies the soul by faith and love, and nothing that is more to you than all other things; if you only have your priest, your church, your ordinances, and your doctrines, your power to use them depends upon conditions that are themselves failing in the wreck of life; and they will not stand you in stead. No man is so armed as the man who has this single element of faith: *Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, of whom I am chief—he is my hope.* Why is he my hope? He loves me. And suppose he does love me, what good does that do? What good does it do when the sun loves the earth? Who can count the myriad products that come from the simple loving of the earth by the sun?

And who can tell what is the millennial glory of the soul when Christ shines with streaming love into it?

Here is the anchor. This is what the apostle was speaking of. This is the hope of immortality through Jesus Christ, which is "as an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the *vail*"—into the very holy of holies.

With this central and controlling power established, any soul may safely swing in any circuits it pleases, within due measure. Once let a ship anchor out in the bay, and though it may let out many fathoms of cable, and though it may, in swinging, become tangled with other craft, if the anchor has a good hold, and the cable is strong, the ship is safe.

Once let a man's soul get anchored upon God, and he may swing round in wide circuits of speculation and doubt, and he will not be materially hurt. He has an anchor that brings him up in due time. But a man that has no faith, a man that is without God, a man that is destitute of an anchor, and that drifts a wanderer in God's universe—woe be to him! How helpless is a man that has no faith in himself, and not much trust in men, and no definite belief, and no God, and no hope!

Let every man, then, search out his soul's vital centre. Not here do you live, except in body. Stop the pulsations of the heart, and the body will die. Here, in your own bosom, is the heart of the body; but the heart of the soul throbs in the bosom of God. There is where the soul begins to live. From thence it derives all its sustenance and supply. The heart of God includes your heart, and you and he are one. You have that which is an insurance against peril and against death, and a security for salvation and life forever and forever.

Go not away, then, to-day, I beseech of you, to think of the things that I have scattered; go not away to think of the laxities, if you please to call them such, which have been enunciated; go not away to think of how old and settled opinions have been meddled with; go not away to think of the various discriminations which I have made in seeking to give enlargement and liberty to imperiled souls—go away and think of this, rather: "God loved me, and so loved me that he gave his Son to die for me. Through Christ, and his sufferings and death, a new and living way is opened, whereby I can become a son of God; and to me is given power to become a son of God." Go and say, in the simplicity of a child's love, "Lord, I love thee better than all; and I will love thee. Guard and love thou me unto the end." And then rejoice. The earth shall perish; the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; but you shall not be hurt. And forever and forever, so long as God lives, you shall live with him, and be his sons in glory.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

O THOU that dwellest in the heaven, and whose heart is in the earth ; thou that wert once a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, but now art ascended on high, a Prince and a Saviour, reach forth to us this morning that sovereign and reviving joy which thou hast and dost impart, and which all thine may have if they are united by faith to thee. Care, and labor, and sickness, and anxieties, and disappointments, and the whole round and turmoil of earthly experience overshadow us. As birds in deep forests forget to sing when the morning is coming, not knowing in the twilight that the whole air above the forest is full of daylight ; so we are silent and voiceless, though thy glory flames above. Help us to fly into that upper air where all the beauty of thy presence is, where thou art, and where we shall be undisturbed by those sluggish thoughts that hold us down, those envious and corrupt thoughts which mar the purity of the soul. Deliver us from the power which holds us to the earth and makes us earthly. Give us more of the vital power of divine inspiration in those elements which unite us together and make us the heirs of immortality.

We beseech of thee, O Lord ! that thou wilt this morning draw near to every one of us. We hate our hatreds ; we hate our prejudices ; we hate our selfishness ; we hate all those corrupt ways, and all those compliances with the world's corrupt ways, which our weakness too often leads us to. We have, to-day, in thy presence, such a thought of manhood in Christ Jesus, that we look upon our real and worldly selves with shame, and can scarcely believe that men who are competent to form such ideas of themselves—ideas so high and Christ-like—do walk in a way so burdened ; in a way so full of imperfection and sin and unloveliness. When we fain would follow thee, who dost breathe peace and give forth joy, how often do we find ourselves breathing forth anger, and seeking cruelly to hurt ! Thou that didst love thine enemies, are we thy followers, who hate our fellow-men with a bitter hatred ? Thou didst forgive even those that were slaughtering thee ; and can not we forgive those who have reached but a little way to disturb our worldly peace and outward prosperity and interest ? How shall we call ourselves thine, if we can not forgive as we are forgiven ? How are we the children of the Lord Jesus Christ, if our hearts are fountains of bitterness, and are not fountains of love, with all its sweet and blessed fruit ?

Grant, we beseech of thee, O Lord ! that we may be changed, and be no longer carnal, nor follow the law of the beasts that rend and ravage. Grant that we may be born into thee, and that we may have that higher beneficence which becomes the sons of God. Teach us that gentleness, that deep peacefulness, which they have whose souls are staid upon thee. From all the fluctuations of our passions ; from the disturbance of pride ; from hungerings after the fantastic follies of vanity, deliver us. Grant unto us that subtle fidelity, that fealty to thy name, that hearty and thorough love of thee, that child-like docility, that leaning and yearning on thy bosom, which shall make us indeed thine own children. And so may we always, either be at home, or within easy reach of it, when we are pursued. To the bosom of our God may we come—when we are defiled, for cleansing ; when we are hungry, for food ; when we are weary, for rest ; when we are alone, for company ; when we are dull, for inspiration ; when we are lifted up, for heavenly and disinterested joy. Be all to us. Whatever all the scattered elements in nature supply, supply thou yet more abundantly. Teach us by our own experience how much more thou art than thy work is ; how much more thy power is, back of law and nature, than all the power which thou hast

infused into the laws of nature. May we behold the glory of the sovereign God which is greater than his greatest work. There may our life be. And around this blissful centre may we move harmonious to the end.

Yet how many there are that are weak ; how many there are that are feeble of wing ; how many there are that are obscure and dim of sight, and can not see thee, nor these things ! Look with compassion on them. Lift them up, we beseech of thee, by thy strength. And if they can not go themselves, bear them in thine own arms. Comfort and strengthen them by a holy faith in Christ Jesus. And grant that this may be the centre of all their lives. May Christ be ours, living or dying ; and, living or dying, may we be Christ's. May we rejoice in his service. May we be inspired by his presence. May our love be taught, and enriched, and restrained, by the presence and love of Christ Jesus. And so may all our thoughts do obeisance to thee, and all our feelings, and every thing that is within us, that we may love thee with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt bless all whom we love ; all that are dispersed from us ; our companions in toil and travail ; the members of our families ; the brethren of the church ; all who are wont to be here, but are in thy providence separated from us. To-day may the blessing of Almighty God go with them in their several ways, and abide with them. We pray that those who remain and labor in their appropriate spheres may be strengthened to all fidelity and to all rejoicing by the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that thou wilt bless those who are providentially with us to-day : all that are strangers in our midst ; all whose hearts yearn for the far off home, and for the friends dearer now that they are separated from them. Grant that they may feel, here, to-day, that the Lord hears and answers their prayers, in mercy, for those who are near to them. Save them from ill tidings of disaster.

And grant, we pray thee, that all who are on the sea, and all who are wanderers in distant lands, may, to-day, by the power of that blessed faith which they have in Christ, be brought near to thee, and to us who are near thee.

And we pray that thy grace may this day abound in all thy churches. Strengthen thy servants to preach. Build up thy churches everywhere in faith and in practice. May all that name the name of Christ appear beautiful to men by their sweetness and sincerity and godliness.

And we pray that thy kingdom may be advanced among the ignorant. May knowledge fly to and fro. May all parts of this earth receive the emancipating tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ. May manhood advance everywhere, and the glory of the earth at last be the glory of the Lord God, that shall come to dwell a thousand years upon the earth.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit. *Amen.*



PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

GRANT thy blessing to rest, we beseech of thee, upon the word spoken this morning. Grant that it may be in season to rescue some that are in peril ; and to hold back, from hazardous and disputatious folly, others. Grant that we may all seek, not so much to find new ways, and to build up shining theories, as to hold the soul steadfastly to honor, and to truth, and to love, by holding it stead-

fastly to God. May the fruit of the Spirit abound in us; and may our manhood, made beautiful and fruitful by the working of the influence of the Spirit of God, be more to us than the pride of system, than the pride of philosophy, or than the pride of reason. Grant that thus we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and unto a perfect manhood in Christ Jesus.

And to thy name shall be the praise, forever and forever. *Amen.*

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